

「内なる境界—安部公房と戦後日本文学」

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ジボー・マーク

## “The Frontier Within: Abe Kôbô and Postwar Japanese Literature”

Mark Gibeau

### Introduction

Abe Kôbô (1924-1993) is perhaps Japan's most famous ignored writer. He is well known throughout Japan where his short stories are commonly included in school textbooks, and he is also widely read overseas, where his novels and other writings have been translated into dozens of languages. In the 1960's a series of exceptional novels, plays, screenplays and critical essays lifted Abe to prominence as one of the dominant literary figures of the decade. Shinchôsha—Abe's main, but not exclusive, publisher—has sold over ten million copies of Abe's works since 1962.<sup>1</sup> In addition to achieving a rare degree of commercial success in Japan, Abe developed a large overseas following that crossed over both sides of the iron curtain. His novels were so popular in the Soviet Union that printings running into the tens of thousands would sell out almost immediately and would fetch outrageous prices on the black market<sup>2</sup>. He achieved similar fame in Western Europe and North America, and in 1964 Hiroshi Teshigahara's film adaptation of Abe's novel, *Suna no onna* (Woman in the Dunes) won the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival. In 1975, despite being on the FBI's list of undesirable aliens, he managed to obtain a visa to travel to the United States (with an American chaperone) in order to accept an honorary doctoral degree, becoming the first Japanese writer to receive such an honor from an American university<sup>3</sup>.

However popular Abe was among readers, he has been largely ignored by critics. An admittedly unscientific search for works on—rather than by—Abe Kôbô in the Japanese Diet Library yields fewer than twenty results. Of them, four are reference texts and several others are only partially concerned with Abe. By way of contrast, an equally unscientific search for works on Mishima Yukio returns over one hundred and fifty results. While a significant gap between readership and critical attention is inevitable in the case of popular fiction, Abe's works are securely positioned in the realm of "serious" literature and it is often remarked that Abe, rather than Ôe, would likely have received the 1994 Nobel Prize for Literature had he lived another year.

In this paper I argue that the gap between Abe's widespread popular acclaim and the critical oblivion into which he has fallen is largely a product of the tendency to represent Abe as an "international" writer whose ties to Japan and the larger field of Japanese literature are superficial at best. I argue that it is necessary to reconfigure Abe not as an "international" writer who functions independently of a local culture from which he has broken entirely, but rather as an "outcast" or nomadic writer whose embrace of the periphery constitutes a radical critique of the local. In this sense the relationship between Abe's works and his critics is a largely antagonistic one. Whereas Abe attempts to dismantle provincial chauvinism in its various forms from the inside and on the most basic theoretical levels, his critics see only abstract, "international" theory that has little or nothing to do with the political, social, cultural or historical situation of Japan. The radical potential of Abe's writings to redefine the basic assumptions upon which the communities of hometown and nation are predicated is buried alive by the almost obsessive desire of the critical community to divorce Abe and his writings from the context of Japan and to relegate them to the ambiguous realm of the international. This approach confines readings of Abe's texts to the most literal and superficial levels, making it impossible to move beyond the apparent contradictions in the texts that bring them to an irresolvable dead-end. As a result much of the criticism

that has been written on Abe see his works as abstract, abstruse and inconclusive commentaries on the alienated state of the modern individual. The notion that Abe is somehow “international” has become so firmly entrenched that it is generally accepted without question, and it is a rare thing for a critic to feel the need to provide evidence in support of this position. However this position has made it exceedingly difficult for people to say anything very interesting about Abe. It is perhaps because of this that most critics have opted to simply remain silent on the topic of Abe’s works.

Instead of becoming entangled in the “Japanese” versus “international” debate, I will briefly outline how Abe tries to expose and critique the fundamental assumptions upon which the categories of “international” and “Japanese” are predicated. Focusing primarily on the collection of essays published under the title *Uchinaru henkyô* (The frontier within, 1971), I present Abe’s critique of the hierarchical and exclusive modes of community and discuss Abe’s attempt to posit an alternative in the form of the ephemeral and egalitarian “nomadic community.”

### Abe Kôbô as an “International” Writer

While there are remarkably few monographs that deal with Abe either directly or indirectly, a great many articles of varying quality have been written on him and his works. The bulk of scholarship on Abe was conducted in the 1960’s and 1970’s, when Abe was at his peak as a novelist. As Abe moved away from novels in order to focus on plays and his drama troupe he was largely forgotten by critics until his death in 1993, which inspired a flurry of eulogies and retrospective analyses of his works. This section of the paper will first describe how and why critics have defined Abe as an “international writer” and then move on to a discussion of how this attempt to position Abe outside of the conventional realm of “Japanese literature” has served to limit the range and scope of criticism on Abe by characterizing his works as antiseptic, abstract and inconclusive meditations on the alienated condition of modern man.

The tendency to isolate Abe from the context of modern Japan and Japanese literature is evident from the beginning of Abe's career. After Abe was awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 1951 for his collection of short stories, *Kabe* (The wall), Haniya Yutaka writes that Abe has had virtually no contact with Japanese literature whatsoever. Abe is an outsider who, "started with Heidegger" and then, instead of succumbing to the influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalism and idealism, went on to learn from Sartre, Kafka and Jules Supervielle. It because of this unconventional literary background, presumably, that Haniya asserts that, "Abe Kôbô is not understood. Critics in our country are incapable of deciding how Abe should be positioned."<sup>4</sup> In the very first years of his career as a writer Abe had gained the reputation that was to stay with him throughout the rest of his life.

Haniya's early assessment of Abe's writing is frequently cited as evidence of the cosmopolitan or "international" aspects of Abe's writings despite the fact that it was based on a small cross-section of Abe's forty-five years as a writer. The tendency to read Abe as an international writer is obvious from the countless that link Abe to internationalism, statelessness and cosmopolitanism.<sup>5</sup> This tendency has not faded over time, and in 1997 a special edition of *Kokubungaku* dedicated to Abe Kôbô was released with the title, *Abe Kôbô: Bôdâresu no shisô* (Abe Kôbô: borderless philosophy).

Characterizations of Abe as "international" are not entirely without merit. Haniya Yutaka's remarks cited above provide the basis for one of the most prevalent arguments: Abe rejected the Japanese literary tradition in favor of modern European philosophy. While the validity of the logic that seeks to represent "Japanese tradition" and "European philosophy" as incompatible opposites is certainly open to question, it is clear that Abe did not undergo the conventional literary education experienced by most of his peers. Abe freely admits that he was not a so-called literary youth and that, when he did start writing, he was so ignorant of the Japanese literary canon that even the name Kawabata Yasunari

was unknown to him. Instead of delving into the classics of modern Japanese literature, Abe read widely in philosophy, mathematics and psychology. What literature he did read came from the 1927 *Sekai bungaku zenshû* (complete works of world literature) published by Shinchôsha.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to spurning the Japanese literary tradition, further evidence of Abe's international nature can be found in his literary embrace of such non-Japanese theories as existentialism and surrealism. Early in his career Abe was, as he readily admits, heavily influenced by Heidegger, Rilke, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, and others. As his style shifted in the early 1950's he added Breton, Appolinaire, Aragon and Marx to this list. But it is difficult to find instances where Abe openly acknowledges the influence of any Japanese thinkers or writers. On the rare occasion when he does discuss Japanese influences, only two figures appear with any sort of regularity: Ishikawa Jun and Hanada Kiyoteru. According to Abe's daughter, however, Ishikawa was not so much an influence as he was a source of inspiration for Abe—a teacher who, though revered, was not to be emulated directly. Hanada, on the other hand, exerted enormous influence over Abe's development as a writer but this was primarily through the writers and thinkers to whom he introduced Abe.

However the most frequently cited evidence of Abe's international character is the fact that he grew up outside of Japan. Though born in Tokyo, Abe was raised in the Japanese puppet state of Manchuria, in the city of what was then called Mukden (now Shenyang). This aspect of Abe's life is considered to be the foundation of Abe's cosmopolitanism and it is out of this experience that all other facets of his international identity emerge. It is because he was in Manchuria, presumably, that he did not become deeply engaged with the Japanese tradition. It is because he grew up on the vast empty plains of Manchuria, with the Gobi desert to his west, that he feels no sense of attachment to conventional Japanese aesthetics, opting instead for the sere landscape of the desert. Having been

stripped of much of that which is considered to be particular to Japan, the logic goes, Abe is quicker to embrace—and to be embraced—by ideas and people outside of Japan. This tactic, by means of which Abe's writings are linked to his childhood years in Manchuria and, through this, set at a remove from Japan, is applied indiscriminately to all his works, regardless of the number of decades that might separate his teenage experiences and mature literary productions. Sasaki Kiichi, a longtime colleague of Abe's, demonstrates this technique in an article published shortly after Abe's death:

Abe's literature is the literature of the lost home. In his literature it is space, rather than time, that plays the most important role. The defining characteristics of the "zero generation" that had for its starting point Japan's defeat in World War II can be found in this use of space, along with his cherished image of the desert. This state of being utterly cut off from Japanese literary tradition is no doubt one reason why he was able to attain a strong degree of internationalism. Stripping himself completely of such things as nostalgic longing for the hometown, Abe Kôbô possessed the courage to wander naked across the desert.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless there are a few—a very few—critics who object to the international and universal labels. Donald Keene argues that Abe's writings are clearly identifiable as Japanese, though perhaps these cultural markers are transparent to Japanese readers. He notes the difficulties he encountered translating a scene in Abe's play, *Tomodachi* (Friends, 1967) where a character expresses outrage at the fact someone has entered the apartment with his shoes on. The disrespect inherent in the act is immediately and obvious to a Japanese reader, but holds no special significance to Keene's largely American readership. Keene also cites the setting of Abe's play "Bô ni natta otoko" (The man who turned into a stick, 1969) as further evidence of the Japanese aspect of Abe's writings. The play is set on the roof of a station department store, a fixture so basic to urban Japan that

it is almost impossible to imagine its absence. Yet again there is no counterpart in America. In this way Keene argues that, to an American reader, Abe's novels are clearly and unmistakably marked as Japanese.<sup>8</sup> To assume that Abe's writings are not Japanese simply because they have broad international appeal is obviously a mistake.<sup>9</sup> Nor is Keene alone in this view. One Russian scholar says that translations of Abe's works reinforced views of exotic Japan as, "... an unusually interesting but extremely odd country."<sup>10</sup> Numano Mitsuyoshi also criticizes the facile application of the international label by non-Japanese critics, saying that it is frequently used as a means for European and American literary discourse to appropriate Abe's works. Rather than categorizing Abe as "international" or "universal," Numano says, it would be much better to simply see him as individual.<sup>11</sup>

The problem with the above positions, with the exception of Numano's, is that they attempt to present Abe as either "Japanese" or "international" without considering the significance of the terms. While the two factions ostensibly occupy opposing positions, they both reinforce the centrality of the nation as the fundamental marker of cultural identity. In the case of the "Japanese" faction, this is so obvious as to not require further elaboration. The internationalist camp, however, is only slightly less obvious. The critics do not determine Abe's status as an "international" writer by comparing him with a specific definition of "international." Rather, he is judged to be international because he does not fulfill the ill-defined yet generally accepted criteria of "Japanese." "International" is simply a category into which the non-Japanese is deposited. A consequence of this action is that anything that might threaten the idea of Japan, or the importance of nationality in determining cultural identity in general, is neutralized. In Abe's case at least, anything that does not coincide with preconceived notions of "Japaneseness" is expelled into the realm of the "international" and as a result even Numano, who opts for "individual" over "Japanese" or "international," falls into this trap. By asserting that Abe is not "international" but simply a

unique individual who holds an important place in world literature Numano too neutralizes the transgressive potential of Abe's writings by treating him as a writer who operates independently of the problem of the nation or national identity and fails to consider the possibility that Abe's rejection of "Japan" might constitute a critique of "Japan" and "Japaneseness."

In a 1957 essay, "Watashi no naka no Manshû: seikatsu to kanjô no jikkenshitsu" (The Manchuria inside me: an experiment in life and emotion), Abe indicates the possibility of another approach as he discusses the significance of growing up in Manchuria on his development as a writer:

[Manchuria] was an enormous colony. In the end it was a part of Japan, not a foreign country. Existing purely to reconcile internal contradictions, it was like the false feet of the amoeba. It was a hotbed of the middle class. Yet because there was little sense of attachment to the idea of a native place, a pure petit bourgeois consciousness developed. Truly simple and good people emerged. When you speak of someone who was raised in Manchuria, people who know nothing of Manchuria...will no doubt imagine a frightening and rough sort of person. But in reality they were very gentle people.

What is more, and this will no doubt come as a surprise, we took the idea of the harmony of the five races (*gozoku kyôwa*) quite seriously. While I cannot speak for the first generation [of colonizers], racial prejudice and xenophobia were unusually rare among the second generation. Naturally, this was nothing so noble as anti-colonial thought. At most it was perhaps a sort of humanistic sympathy. It was probably because the idea of "nativism" (*kyôdoshugi*) never really took hold. Japanese nationalism differs slightly from modern nationalism in that it is really nothing more than an extension of nativism. Since we lived in a place where there was no nativism, we didn't develop a sense of nationalism.<sup>12</sup>



While Abe's statement on Manchuria and the influence it had on national identity is the product of his personal experience and is not the result of rigorous academic analysis, it is important in that it reveals how Abe interpreted his experiences in relation to his "home" of Japan and his position in postwar Japanese society. The "pure petit bourgeois" society of colonial Manchuria disappeared the moment Japan lost the war. "Like distilled water," Abe says, "it evaporated, vanishing without a trace."<sup>13</sup> The humanistic sympathy that served to bring all the different races together in a warm and harmonious community, it turns out, was predicated on a fundamental imbalance of power. When Abe writes, "we took the idea of the harmony of the five races quite seriously," the "we" obviously refers to the Japanese colonizers and not to the original inhabitants of the land who were displaced and oppressed by the Japanese. "Harmony," one is not particularly surprised to discover, actually meant subjugation and pacification. The colonial society was, Abe says, ultimately a sort of "hothouse flower" that withered and died once the Japanese lost their position of authority. Real harmony based on true equality was of course impossible because the entire colonial structure requires an imbalance of power. When the colonial structure collapsed, however, the destruction was not limited to the façade of the "harmony of the five races." The Japanese community, which defined its own humanistic superiority through its tolerant and enlightened treatment of the lesser races, suddenly found that it no longer had a passive other against which it could define itself. The shared privilege that had united the Japanese as ruling class in Manchuria disappeared overnight, and with it any pretense of solidarity. In his essays and his fiction Abe emphasizes the way in which the Japanese community turned upon itself in the chaos that followed the defeat. In an instant they turned on one another, concerned only for their own individual welfare. "Overnight," Abe says, "I went from being a product of imperialism to being a product of the postwar." The demise of the colonial apparatus erased the relatively clear boundaries separating "self" (colonizers) and "other" (the colonized peoples). As a "product of the postwar," Abe was forced into an awareness of the fragile and arbitrary nature of the self as

defined by the modern nation-state.

The article above was published in 1957 at approximately the same time as *Kemonotachi wa kokyô o mezasu* (The beasts head for home), a novel about a young boy who was stranded in Manchuria at the end of the war. In the article and the novel the move to dissociate author and protagonist from Japan is not an appeal to internationalism. Rather it is an attempt to examine the underlying contradictions upon which the concepts of national identity in particular and communal identity in general rest. Abe distances himself from conventional notions of Japanese as an essentialized source of identity, to be sure, but he does so deliberately, with the purpose of maintaining a higher degree of critical awareness toward these notions. Abe's writings are not generically "international" but rather, as I will discuss in the next section of the paper, they are attempts to develop a complex theory of the "nomad" which criticizes and attempts to formulate an alternative to the essentializing structure of communal identity.

### **Abe Kôbô as a Nomadic Writer**

The bulk of Abe's writings from the mid 1950's to the early 1970's revolve around the opposition between "fixed" and "nomadic" communities and identities. The fixed community posits an essential and immutable connection binding individual and community to one another and stabilizing both. In the nomadic community the idea of a fixed, eternal, or inalterable connection between the individual and the community is rejected outright. The nomadic community is instead ephemeral and discursive. The primary benefit of this model of community is, in Abe's mind, while the fixed community reduces individuals to an aspect of the community and forces individuals to define or interpret themselves in accord with the rules and criteria of that community, the relationship between the individual and the nomadic community is not hierarchical. There is no pretense of an essential bond or an essential source of identity that defines either the individual or the community. One's tie to the community is explicitly performative and it

can be broken or altered at any time. In this section of the paper I will discuss two essays, both written in 1968, in which Abe develops this position and examine the significance that it holds for how Abe's literary works are read. In the first essay, "Itan no pasupôto" or "Heretical passport" Abe discusses the idea of "attachment to the land" and links it to the ideological foundations of the modern nation-state. In the second essay, "Uchinaru henkyô" or "The frontier within" Abe uses the question of why Jewish writers and thinkers have played such a pivotal role in the cultural development of the twentieth century as a springboard to develop his opposition of the nomadic community versus the fixed community and the potential the nomadic holds for contemporary society.

#### "Itan no pasupôto"

"Itan no pasupôto" is a wide-ranging essay that begins with the evolution of the Paranthropus and the Australopithecus hominids millions of years ago, traces the emergence of the ideology of attachment and likens Genghis Khan to the manager of a Shinjuku pachinko parlor trinket shop. While Abe has read a great deal of scholarship on the issues he discusses, it is clearly not intended to be an academic treatise. Rather he uses various historical, anthropological and sociological metaphors to develop his concepts of the settled and nomadic communities. "Itan no pasupôto" centers around a reexamination of the conventional narrative that plots the development of human society. It is believed, Abe says, that the evolution of human society passed through three basic stages of development: hunter-gatherer, nomadic, and agricultural. It is typically considered to be a self-evident fact that each category marks a stage in the evolution of human society, with the settled, agricultural community constituting its pinnacle. Abe uses the work of the German anthropologist, Julius Lips, and his concept of the "harvest peoples" (Erntevölker) to challenge this approach.

The harvest peoples, Abe says, constituted a transitional stage that followed the hunter-gatherer period and were followed by the simultaneous development

of nomadic and settled, agricultural communities. The harvest peoples differed from the hunter-gatherers in that, while they both subsisted on what they found in the wild, the harvest peoples established a permanent base for their tribe where they would store—and protect—a supply of excess food that would enable them to survive food shortages that would have devastated a hunter-gatherer tribe. This structure of community, however, necessarily resulted in a division of labor between those who would remain at the base and those who would range out in search of food. As each of the groups grew more specialized they became increasingly distinct from one another. It was only a small step for the sedentary group to begin to domesticate animals and plant crops. The need to regulate the use and division of the lands surrounding, or “belonging to” the base transformed the culture and laws of the community. As the gatherers became more proficient in their tasks and, presumably, took to ranging farther away and for longer periods of time, they too developed a culture and set of laws better suited to their way of life. It is not surprising that the two communities would eventually split as the sedentary group was structured around the controlled use of the land while the gatherers had absolutely no concept of the land as property.

It is at this stage, with the emergence of the settled, agricultural communities in opposition to the nomadic communities, that Abe says the roots of the “mystical faith” in the land—what he calls the religion of “Mother Earth”—developed. The settled communities, Abe says, defined themselves by means of a two-part movement, one of which affirmed the virtues of settled life, and the other of which expelled the nomadic and equated it with chaos, danger and terror:

They had to protect themselves from the lure of the horizon while, at the same time, they worried about how to prevent their families and the other villagers from deserting. So they whispered to one another of the blessings of “Mother Earth.” They contrasted the virtues of settled life to the hardships of wandering. Before long that which lie beyond the horizon

naturally came to be seen as a terrible place, as if it were inhabited by demons and the spirits of the dead.<sup>14</sup>

It was necessary to create a feeling of attachment and belonging and to cultivate the belief that one's existence as an individual was somehow inextricably related to the land upon which one resided in order to stabilize the settled community. Previously the boundary between the settled and the nomadic was at best ambiguous and, without a clear separation of the two there was the real danger of the community simply evaporating the first time it encountered difficulties. However, Abe notes, though the settled communities would just as soon forget about the nomads and relegate them to the world of mythical and supernatural creatures, they did not possess that option for long. These "anti-territorial outcast tribes"—as Abe refers to them—did not vanish. With the domestication of the horse they gained unprecedented mobility and power and for centuries they dominated the settled communities, as evidenced by the Mongol empire. Over the past several hundred years, however, the settled communities have increased their territories, encroaching on the vast expanse of the frontiers upon which the nomads roam. In the form of the nation-state, modern settled communities have managed to expand their boundaries to the extent that the frontier can be said to no longer exist in any meaningful form: "With the exception of the South Pole the entire earth has been portioned out into established nation-states. Beyond each border there is only yet another established nation-state."<sup>15</sup>

While the proliferation of nation-states has largely succeeded in erasing external frontiers, it simultaneously created the new, internal frontier of the city. Nomads have not disappeared but have moved from the outside to the inside. The city, like the frontier, is a space where the "religion" of attachment to the land does not hold sway. As Abe demonstrates in his only superficially altered rendition of a passage of Sima Qian's *Shiji*, the resemblance between the Huns and the "riffraff" one typically finds in such places as Shinjuku is more than passing:

They spend all their time with their friends, prowling about all year long. They do all of their eating and drinking out of doors and have no home to which they could return.... They love to come and go as they wish and are fond of fighting and quickly form into gangs. But if they lose they disperse in the blink of an eye and appear to feel no shame in fleeing. They are relentless when it comes to bartering but have no sense of etiquette at all. If they make some profit or receive some windfall, the young just use it all to feast and leave nothing for the future. It is a world where only the strong survive.<sup>16</sup>

While the city functions as both the “heart and brain” of the state, serving as the economic, political and cultural center of the state, it is at the same time reviled by a public that continues to define itself in the language of the settled, agricultural community. What is necessary today, Abe argues, is to go beyond the limitations of the language of the old, agricultural community and to develop a language that is capable of speaking of the city in its own terms.<sup>17</sup> It is the contradictions and possibilities of the city as the modern frontier that Abe addresses in the essay “Uchinaru henkyô.”

#### “Uchinaru henkyô”

“Uchinaru henkyô” is ostensibly an attempt to answer the question of why the Jew has played such a pivotal role in the cultural development of the twentieth century:

Irving Shaw, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Phillip Roth, Bernard Malamud, J.D. Salinger, Arthur Miller, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, Gombrowicz, Hoffmansthal, Franz Kafka, Bertolt Brecht, Franz Werfel, Freud, Georg Simmel, Karl Loweth, Ehrenburg, Jasienski, Pasternak... Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin, Marks, Riesman, Einstein, etc., etc. Even from this brief listing we get a glimpse of unbelievably enormous scale

of the contribution that this one race (if we can provisionally refer to it as such) has made to contemporary culture.<sup>18</sup>

While Abe does much more than simply pay lip service to the question posed above, it soon becomes clear that the ultimate purpose of the essay is to apply the concepts of nomadic and settled communities developed in “Itan no pasupôto” to the situation of the nation-state and the question of the nomadic Jew is examined primarily insofar as it relates to that purpose.

At the core of Abe’s argument is the premise that the state functions by means of a structure of community virtually identical to that of the settled, agricultural community. In the modern nation-state the concept of “land” as employed by premodern agricultural communities becomes conflated with the “territory” over which the state exerts control, or aspires to exert control. Though the two modes of community are obviously distinct, Abe argues that the basic ideological mechanism by which they are defined—that is, linking individual and community by means of an irrational bond with the land—is essentially the same. Whereas the Jew exemplifies, in some respects, what Abe sees as the potential of the nomad and of the nomadic community, the anti-Semite embodies the limitations and violence inherent in the hierarchical and exclusive communal structure of the nation/agricultural community. Abe cites Sartre’s 1946 work, *Anti-Semite and Jew* as evidence of the central importance of the “Land” in the ideological structure of anti-Semitism:

The anti-Semite can conceive only of a type of primitive ownership of land based on a veritable magical rapport, in which the thing possessed and its possessor are united by a bond of mystical participation; he is the poet of real property. It transfigures the proprietor and endows him with a special and concrete sensibility.<sup>19</sup>

The anti-Semite does not simply “own” or inhabit the land, the land also “owns” and “inhabits” the anti-Semite. It is impossible to separate the two and in this way the anti-Semite is able to justify his xenophobia and racism as essentially “natural” phenomena. It is not simply an individual bias; it is a “special and concrete sensibility” that emerges of itself out of the land that separates those who “belong” from those who do not. The appropriation of this notion by the nation-state allows this form of xenophobic provincialism to grow in scale, both spatially and temporally. National subjects lay claim to the entirety of national culture, history and tradition—it is just as much a part of them as the land out of which they sprouted. By virtue of their shared bond with the French land, the illiterate peasant is able to assert an understanding of Racine more immediate and profound than the most erudite Jew could ever hope to achieve. For the peasant, it is not a matter of intellectual understanding—to the anti-Semite, the intellect is inherently “Jewish”—the bond is precognitive: “I possess Racine—Racine and my country and my soil.”<sup>20</sup>

However, as the term “anti-Semite” clearly shows, the authenticity of the anti-Semite can only be defined through its opposition to a specific representation of the Jew. As the bond with the land is at heart irrational and as such can not be empirically defined, the only way for the anti-Semite to confirm his or her authenticity is to construct a representation of the inauthentic—the Jew—and then to expel or destroy that representation. It is not simply that the anti-Semite “makes the Jew” as both Abe and Sartre assert, since the anti-Semite is defined as the opposite of the Jew, the anti-Semite makes the anti-Semite as well. Both are constructs defined solely through their opposition to one another. The anti-Semite’s bond with the land is revealed by means of the Jew’s alienation from the land and vice-versa. Thus it is not surprising that Nazi party rhetoric saw the ideal Aryan in the figure of the ruddy-faced German peasant, a “wholesome” man who lived in intimate contact with nature. The Jew, on the other hand, was seen as embodying the opposite extreme, to the extent that Hitler claims, “You should not



call the Jew an animal. The Jew is even more distant from animals than we Aryans. The Jew is utterly estranged from nature.”<sup>21</sup> The anti-Semite, Abe says, can only see the Jew as:

...A dirty bureaucrat holed up in a government office, a noisy enlightenment theorist, a liberalist, a usurer, a doctor, a trader, an inventor, a Romantic composer, a wealthy financier, a lawyer, a labor organizer, a natural scientist, a university professor, a writer, a Marxist: in other words, anything but a German farmer. Capable of assuming any number of disguises, the Jew was an urban demon.<sup>22</sup>

This representation of the Jew is not exclusive to Nazi Germany. Abe notes that Stalin’s campaign against Jewish writers in the late 1940’s relied on much the same rhetoric in characterizing the enemies of the people as, “...cosmopolitanism, rootless grasses, modernism, petit-bourgeois tastes, Western European corruption, bourgeois objectivism, freedom, decadence, and nihilism.”<sup>23</sup> The “rootless cosmopolitan” (the Jew) could not be trusted because he lacks the essential, mystical and unbreakable bond with the “motherland” that makes betrayal impossible.

The irony of the anti-Semitic model, and it is an irony that is central to Abe’s writings, is that if one follows his logic it is ultimately the anti-Semite, and not the Jew, who leads an alienated existence. Because anti-Semitism has at its base the belief that a complete, organic bond with the core of identity—the hometown, the folk, the nation, the land—is possible, its adherents condemn themselves to a quest for authenticity that can never be brought to a successful conclusion. The ideal union of individual and land can never occur. On a superficial level it is of course impossible to realize the agrarian paradise imagined by the anti-Semite in the modern urbanized nation-state. In this respect, Abe says, the anti-Semite is attempting to translate a way of thinking that is, “more appropriate to a remote

farming village from the Middle Ages.”<sup>24</sup> However the more fundamental and important reason is that anti-Semitism is, at its core, empty. It signifies only through the act of exclusion. The only way that “true” identification with the source of identity could be realized would be to expel completely and utterly all that is “Jew-ish” (*yudayateki naru mono*). However, since the “self” in the anti-Semitic model is defined by means of its opposition to the Jew (the “anti-Semitic”), the complete destruction of the Jewish Other would necessarily result in the disappearance of the anti-Semitic self. In this sense the anti-Semitic model can be said to exist only as an expression or performance of nostalgic desire. It longs for what is lost precisely because it can never be realized.

On the other hand the Jew, not having a home or even the concept of the home, cannot “lose” the home or be haunted by that loss. It is only the anti-Semite who is defined by loss. Whereas the “rootlessness” of the Jew, in Abe’s eyes, enables him to understand the city in its own terms. Attachment to the land makes this impossible for the anti-Semite. The city is inherently opposed to the ideology of attachment that lies at the base of anti-Semitism. Thus, despite the fact that modern nation-state could not exist without the urban center, the anti-Semite can only represent the city in negative terms. Just as the image of the tightly knit agricultural community is romanticized and idealized as the paragon of national virtue, Abe notes that the city is represented as a “hell,” home to “...poverty, violence, drugs, gambling and every other form of hopeless dream.”<sup>25</sup> This is inevitable, Abe says. The city can only be represented as a nightmare because it is being described in the language and morality of the agricultural community, its polar opposite.<sup>26</sup> The city is a vast, threatening wasteland for the “authentic citizen” of the state or the anti-Semite. While necessity requires that they spend a certain amount of time on this wasteland—perhaps their whole lives—it is for them simply a border that must be traversed as quickly as possible. Though they may recognize some of its benefits, “authentic citizens” are “consumed by the anxiety of one who resides in a temporary shelter.”<sup>27</sup> The city is nothing if not a

constant reminder of the fact that they are not at home.

While anti-Semitism is important insofar as it highlights the mechanism of exclusion employed by the nation-state, Abe's true interest lies in the ambiguous position of the Jew. Specifically, Abe is concerned with the existential complications that attend being forced to play the role of heretic. The relationship between the Jew and the anti-Semitic community is very complex as, on the one hand, the Jew is "admitted" to the community, but only in the role of the "heretic" to be expelled. However this position contains no provision for the subjectivity of the Jew. This is not particularly surprising as the anti-Semite uses representations of the Jew as an absolute other in opposition to which the authenticity of the self is confirmed. If provisions were made for the subjectivity of the Jew, if it were assumed that the Jew too possessed a self just like the anti-Semite, the entire model would collapse. The result of this is that a clear break exists between the Jew-as-subject and the representation of the Jew that is employed by the (anti-Semitic) community. While the Jew, on the one hand, sticks out as a target of oppression and violence, the subjectivity of the Jew remains completely invisible to a community that cannot fathom the possibility of Jewish subjectivity. The result is that the Jew-as-subject "floats" in a kind of social purgatory, not unlike the situation of Kafka's protagonists. Like Josef K. in *The Trial*, there is a logic that governs society and the physical body of the protagonist, but the protagonist is always at a remove from that logic and from the laws that control him. There is an insurmountable gap between the object upon which the law operates in *The Trial* and the subjectivity of the protagonist. It is this that imbues the isolation of the Jew with its distinct and unique quality. A more conventional "outsider" is an outsider only in the relative sense. He has a home to which he might return. Whether or not he actually returns is not relevant. What matters is that he possesses the notion of the home and the possibility of a return. The Jew (who is distinct in this sense from the Israeli) is a universal outsider. The Jew is defined by society as that person who has no home and it is in this sense that Abe understands

the Jew to be the "ultimate exile," because "no matter where he goes, he is never home."<sup>28</sup> This is inevitable as the notion of home, as established by the anti-Semitic community, is itself predicated on the expulsion of the Jew.

Abe recognizes that some people claim that the true appeal of Jewish writers and thinkers is not a result of superior achievement but rather the absence of a national culture that would serve to "particularize" their texts gives them greater universal appeal.<sup>29</sup> It is an argument that follows the logic of a great deal of the criticism that has been written on Abe's "internationalism" and Abe is quick to dismiss it as a simplistic misrepresentation of the Jew. They are "universal" *not* because they lack distinguishing, specific characteristics—a most dehumanizing kind of humanism—but rather because their specific situation, the condition of "floating" in society, the condition of never being able to go home has become something of a universal condition in the nation-state. Though the urban centers continue to experience explosive growth and continue to play an ever more dominant role in the economic, cultural and political makeup of the state, the state nonetheless continues to imagine as its authentic citizen the "noble farmer."<sup>30</sup> All that is affiliated with the urban is stigmatized as "heretical." This vicious cycle, which began with the Jew, will ultimately grow to consume even the most "authentic" of citizens:

In the end a fantasy is nothing more than a fantasy. As urbanization continues and matures even those citizens who believed themselves to be part of the orthodoxy will not be protected by relentless incantations of the 'faith in the land.' They too will no doubt experience the inexorable spread of feelings of empty inadequacy. The enormous influence that Jewish writers and so-called writers in exile have begun to wield is but a sign that the good work of the 'orthodox faith' as wielded by the nation-state is rapidly approaching its limit.<sup>31</sup>

## Nomadic Communities

“Itan no pasupôto” and “Uchinaru henkyô” are emblematic of Abe’s writings in a number of ways. In terms of content, the essays outline the basic opposition around which the bulk of Abe’s mature writings revolve: the fixed versus the nomadic. However the methodology Abe employs is also typical of his writings around this period. Abe begins with a concrete social problem and uses it as a springboard from which he abstracts theories of human society. It is a methodology that is ambitious and problematic in roughly equal measures. On the one hand one can, with some justification, take Abe to task for the blithe manner in which he appropriates enormous historical events such as the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the Japanese colonization of China, Korea, and Hokkaidô without even a passing reference to the incredible human suffering they engendered. There is no discussion of the mass murder of the Jews by the Nazis in “Uchinaru henkyô,” no discussion of the privations of the original residents of the puppet state of Manchuria in *Owarishimichi no shirube ni* and *Kemonotachi wa kokyô o mezasu*, nor is there any serious discussion of the social effects of Japanese colonization of Korea or Hokkaido in *Seifuku* (Uniform, 1954) or *Enomoto Buyô* (Enomoto Buyô, 1964), respectively. Abe displays an unseemly degree of detachment from the visceral reality of these events when he uses them as the thread from which to weave a grand theory of human identity and community.

This aspect of Abe’s writings is perhaps best demonstrated by comparing “Uchinaru henkyô” with the text that inspired it, Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew*. For Sartre the problem of anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jew is a philosophical problem—an existential problem—but it is at the same time a concrete, social problem that demands immediate attention. This is clear from the impassioned plea with which he ends his text. Sartre calls for the immediate formation of a “militant league against anti-Semitism.” This is not idle theory; Sartre wants this league to obtain official national recognition, to expand into an international association, to intervene when required and to turn the tide against

anti-Semitism through direct intervention, propaganda and education. For Sartre there is no greater issue that deserves more immediate attention, not simply to protect the Jews from further suffering, but for the sake of all peoples:

...What is needed is not to appeal to the generosity of the Aryans—with even the best of them, that virtue is in eclipse. What must be done is to point out to each one that the fate of the Jews is his fate. Not one Frenchman will be free so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fulness of their rights. Not one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew—in France or *in the world at large*—can fear for his life.<sup>32</sup>

While the two essays are quite different in terms of purpose and scope, a comparison is not entirely meaningless. As Abe had never lived in a country with a tradition of anti-Semitism it is perhaps unavoidable that it should lack the sense of immediacy it had for Sartre, who was a witness to the countless cruelties visited upon Jews prior to and during the war. Yet, even taking this into account, Abe's treatment of the Jew and anti-Semitism takes on the tone of a purely academic discussion. The Jew becomes a case study, used to prove a particular theorem. The result of this approach is evident in the dramatic difference between Sartre's call to arms at the conclusion of his text and the ambiguous and highly contemplative manner in which Abe ends his essay:

Though the "festival" that sings the praises of the land has come to an end, the new plazas are still dark. Guevera, who transcended borders, is dead. The Vietnamese who have lost their borders burn in the fires of war. Yet do not be overly quick to despair. Though the plazas of the city are dark, the national borders are darker still. And those who seek to transcend those borders are not aided by light alone.<sup>33</sup>

Though Abe refers to the murder of Che Guevera and the war in Vietnam,

his reference to these events is not substantially different than his reference to the genocide of the Jews. That is, it is not part of a specific social critique but rather evidence of the larger and more abstract theory that the nation-state is in the process of feeding on and destroying itself. While it is not unfair to criticize Abe for his slight treatment of the concrete, historical reality of the various events he uses in his essays and works, this does not mean that he is completely disconnected from the immediate social reality through which he develops his theories. "Uchinaru henkyô" does not explicitly or implicitly assert that anything "good" came out of the persecution of the Jews. While clearly written from the privileged position of one who belongs to the colonizing race, *Owarishimichi no shirube ni, Kemonotachi wa kokyô o mezasu* or Abe's treatment of the theme of Manchuria in general do not attempt to romanticize or idealize the colonies. Even a superficial reading of the texts is sufficient to indicate that they are fundamentally different from that genre of works that renders the colony "exotic" and imbues them with the air of a utopian paradise where the colonizer can escape from the "ills" of modern society. That form of exotic fantasy in which one's "humanity" is restored by means of direct contact with "nature" (and natives) is rather a product of the agricultural ideology that is the object of Abe's fiercest attacks.

Abe's methodology, I argue, is not simply the product of ideological blindness—though Abe, like everyone else, does have his blind spots—but is instead a tactical decision. It is a tactic that is an extension of his assertion in "Uchinaru henkyô" that the anti-Semite makes the Jew. If the anti-Semite creates the Jew, it is not enough to simply take the side of the Jew and argue that the anti-Semite ought not oppress, persecute and murder the Jew. It is not possible to reconcile the anti-Semite and the Jew. Ultimately Abe sees the oppression, persecution and murder of the Jew as manifestations of structural problems inherent in the relationship between individual, community and other. To replace one flawed manifestation with another, differently flawed manifestation is not a solution. Indeed, in Abe's mind, the dominant mode of community is predicated

on the construction and expulsion of the other. If true change is to occur, it is first necessary to arrive at a much more thorough understanding of the mechanism by which we comprehend ourselves and the world in which we live. Accordingly, Abe does not attempt to tinker with or revise specific aspects of the "*nichijô*," or the perceived reality of "daily life." He does not attempt to repair the myriad injustices and flaws of the *nichijô* but rather tries to twist and pull the *nichijô* itself, straining it to the breaking point. Subjecting it to his own specific brand of estrangement, Abe attempts to render opaque the invisible ideology of daily life.

Abe's "international" reputation is no doubt a result of his choice of tactics. He is "international"—which is, again, simply a euphemism for "non-Japanese"—because he does not discuss Japan on the immediate, specific and concrete level that critics expect to see in a truly "Japanese" work. He writes instead of the Manchurian plains, endless urban wastelands, and barren deserts. People and places are devoid of names, and the landscapes of his texts are stripped bare of all that would identify them as uniquely "Japanese." Yet is it appropriate to isolate Abe and his writings from Japan for these reasons? Is it reasonable to consider Manchuria as somehow outside the realm of Japanese experience when Japan's imperial expansionism played a definitive role in the development of modern Japan? Abe's themes of the borders, Manchuria, the empty wastelands and the anonymous cities are not "non-Japanese;" they are simply part of a different narrative of Japan, one that is not confined by the belief that "Japanese" must necessarily mean "uniquely Japanese." This position is perhaps best encapsulated in the opening lines of the awkwardly entitled essay, "*Sakura wa itanshinmonkan no monshô*" (Cherry blossoms are the inquisitor's coat of arms, 1957):

I hate cherry blossoms. When I pass under a profusion of night blossoms, like a tunnel, the flowers are wisps of clouds in the night sky, and it is beautiful. But beautiful or not, I still hate them. I hate them because of another kind of cherry blossom in the hearts of the Japanese.<sup>34</sup>



Abe goes on to discuss this “other kind of cherry blossom” as a manifestation of what he calls “*jounen*” or “sentiment.” While often confused with “feelings” or “emotion,” Abe says that “sentiment” is fundamentally different. Whereas a feeling is a physiological response to a stimulus, sentiment is akin to language. While, “...not as systematic as the structure of language, it emerges of itself as a result of repeated shared experience.”<sup>35</sup> Sentiment is normally limited by the fact that it is only able to signify within the context of a specific cultural community, but in the hands of the inquisitor it can take on enormous power. As a “password,” “litmus test” or a *fumi-e*, “sentiment” serves as the primary ideological mechanism by which individual and community are linked. While internationalists seek to use Abe’s rejection of “sentiment” —a quality not unlike what Sartre calls the “special and concrete sensibility” of the anti-Semite—as a reason for divorcing Abe’s writings from the historical, political and literary contexts of Japan, Abe’s rejection of sentiment can also be seen as a means by which to redefine the relationship between Abe’s works and Japan through the development of “anti-sentimental” concepts of self and community.

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- 1 Since 1962 Shinchôsha has published fifteen hardcover works (1,44,500 volumes), twenty-four paperback works (8,740,200 volumes), and two versions of Abe’s complete works (the first, published in the 1972 selling 474,000 volumes and the second, published beginning in 1997 selling 141,950 volumes. While the hardcover works and the first version of Abe’s complete works have since gone out of print, paperback versions and his latest set of complete works continue to be sold. All sales data was obtained directly from the publisher. In addition to works sold prior to 1962 and works sold by other publishers, one must also consider the popularity of films based on Abe’s works, radio and television dramas written by Abe and the numerous plays staged by Abe’s drama troupe in the 1970’s.
  - 2 Numano Mitsuyoshi, “Sekai no naka no Abe Kôbô,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyôzai no kenkyû* 42 (August 1997): 12. Throughout the dissertation names of authors of works written in Japanese will be listed according to Japanese convention, with surname first followed directly by the given name.

- 3 Nancy K. Shields, *Fake Fish: The Theater of Abe Kobo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 21. In 1975 Abe received the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Columbia University.
- 4 Haniya Yûtaka, "Abe Kôbô, *Kabe*" in *Sakka no sekai Abe Kôbô*, ed. Sasaki Kiichi (Tokyo: Banchô Shobô, 1978), 85. The essay was originally published in the April 1951 edition of the magazine *Ningen*.
- 5 Examples of such articles would include "Mottomo kokusaiteki na sakka," (The most international writer) "Kokusaisei o saguru," (Searching for the international) "'Kuni' o koeta Abe Kôbô san," (Abe Kôbô, the man who transcended his country) "Eiga sakka to nihon dasshutsu," (A screenwriter and escape from Japan) "Suichû toshi" Gekihyô – Nihonbanare shita imeji yûhatsu," (A review of the play "Underwater city" : An invitation to non-Japanese imagery) "Soren bungaku no koten to shite no Abe Kôbô," (Abe Kôbô as classical Soviet literature) "Cheko de no Abe Kôbô," (Abe Kôbô in Czechoslovakia) "Nihonteki jôkyô kara no dasshutsu – Abe Kôbô," (Abe Kôbô: escaping from the Japanese condition) "Sekai no naka no Abe Kôbô," (Abe Kôbô in the world) "Abe Kôbô ron – mukokusekisha no shiten," (On Abe Kôbô: The perspective of a stateless writer) "Abe Kôbô: kyomu kara no shuppatsu," (Abe Kôbô: departing from a void) "Seijiteki kokyô o koeru Abe bungaku," (Transcending political borders: the literature of Abe Kôbô) "Abe Kôbô – kokkyô to gengo o ôdan suru bungaku," (Abe Kôbô: literature across borders and languages) "Kokusaisei o eta nihonbungaku," (A Japanese literature that has become international). Full citations can be found in Kuwahara Masaomi, *Abe Kôbô bungaku kenkyû sankô bunken mokuroku* (Nara: Kuwahara Masaomi, 2000), pages 99, 13, 11, 18, 18, 31, 69, 32, 100, 99, and 96 respectively.
- 6 Abe Kôbô, "Watashi no bungaku o kataru," *Mita bungaku* 55 (March 1968): 7.
- 7 Cited in Numano Mitsuyoshi, "Henkyô to iu wana – Abe Kôbô wa hontô ni 'mukokuseki sakka' ka," *Subaru* 15 (June 1993): 198.
- 8 Keene Donald, "Honmono no tensai Abe Kôbô," *Chûô Kôron* 108 (April 1993): 301.
- 9 Ibid., 300.
- 10 Chkhartishvili Grigori, "Soren bungaku no koten to shite no Abe Kôbô," *Shinchô* 90 (April 1993): 97.
- 11 See Numano Mitsuyoshi, "Henkyô to iu wana – Abe Kôbô wa hontô ni mukokuseki sakka ka," 198-205, Numano Mitsuyoshi, "Sekai no naka no Abe Kôbô," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyôzai no kenkyû* 42 (August 1997): 12-18.
- 12 Abe Kôbô, "Watashi no naka no Manshû: seikatsu to kanjô no jikkenshitsu," in *Abe Kôbô zenshû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1998), 7:137.

- 13 Ibid., 138.
- 14 Abe Kôbô, "Itan no pasupôto," in *Uchinaru henkyô* (Tokyo: Chûô kôronsha, 1971), 53.
- 15 Ibid., 58.
- 16 Ibid., 59.
- 17 Abe Kôbô, "Toshi ni tsuite," in *Abe Kôbô zenshû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1999), 20:397.
- 18 Abe Kôbô, "Uchinaru Henkyô," in *Uchinaru henkyô* (Tokyo: Chûô kôronsha, 1971), 122-123.
- 19 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 23-24.
- 20 Ibid., 24.
- 21 Abe, "Uchinaru henkyô," 75. Abe is citing Funato Mitsuyuki's translation of Hermann Raushning, *Eien naru Hitorâ*.
- 22 Ibid., 76.
- 23 Ibid., 91. One of the first salvos in Stalin's anti-Semitic policy, euphemistically known as a campaign against the "rootless cosmopolitan," was fired in a January 28, 1949 Pravda article entitled, "About One Antipatriotic Group of Theater Critics." The article attacked Jewish critics as, "...unbridled, evil-minded cosmopolitans, profiteers with no roots and no conscience... Grown on rotten yeast of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, decadence and formalism... non-indigenous nationals without a motherland, who poison with stench... our proletarian culture." See "Rootless Cosmopolitan" *Wikipedia*, 5 Aug. 2005 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rootless\\_cosmopolitan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rootless_cosmopolitan)>.
- 24 See Abe, "Itan no pasupôto," 33-64 for Abe's discussion of historical development of the myth of "mother earth" that serves as the basis of anti-Semitic thought.
- 25 Abe, "Toshi ni tsuite," 398.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Abe, "Uchinaru henkyô," 133.
- 28 Abe Kôbô, "Eien no Kafuka," in *Abe Kôbô zenshû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 2000), 27:75.
- 29 Abe, "Uchinaru henkyô," 127. Interestingly, this is precisely the same logic employed by critics who credit Abe's international appeal to what they must assume to have been a "neutral" upbringing in Manchuria.
- 30 Ibid., 131.
- 31 Ibid., 133-134.
- 32 Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 153.
- 33 Abe, "Uchinaru henkyô," 135.
- 34 Abe Kôbô, "Sakura wa itanshinmonkan no monshô," in *Abe Kôbô zenshû* (Tokyo:

Shinchôsha, 2000), 27: 91.

35 Ibid.